

Since We Were Young by v_writings

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Summary:

You and Jonathan have liked each other since forever, but neither of you know about the other's feelings. After everything that happened in Hawkins, it seems like a perfect time to get everything out in the open.

Since We Were Young

A tired sigh leaves your lips as you close your locker, books already on your hands as you start walking towards your next class. You feel the tiredness seeping into your bones as you try to avoid the people walking in the corridor as much as possible, trying to make yourself as small and unnoticeable as you possibly can.

The previous days of this week were actually quite light and you didn't have that many problems, but this morning there was a magazine in the kitchen table while you ate breakfast and you couldn't help but skim through the pages just because you wanted to do something to pass the time.

In retrospect, you feel like you should've known that wasn't a good idea.

Page after page of gorgeous, skinny women advertising every beauty product you could imagine– hell, it almost looked as if they were advertising beauty itself– took a toll on you.

You know you don't look like them, you've always known that and there's a part of you that feels angry at them for being what everyone wants– what everyone considers to be beautiful– and there is another that says that of course they're beautiful and that's okay, but is it fair that they are the only ones allowed to be?

You know what everyone expects of you, what everyone says men look for in women– but you're not that, and maybe you'll never be. Maybe you'll never want to be. And what's going to happen then? Why is it okay for you to wake up every day wishing your body was different?

Smaller. Thinner. Skinner.

More compliant to what beauty is supposed to look like in a girl.

You don't fit in that mold, and even though you've always longed to be the girl with the body no one doubted was beautiful, it still makes you feel deeply unsatisfied to know that for some reason your body

isn't associated with being beautiful in the way thinner bodies are.

It's just the way things are.

When Jonathan woke up yesterday morning and went to the kitchen to make breakfast, the last thing he was expecting was his life to change forever.

The hours between the moment when he realized Will was missing and right now are somewhat of a blur; he mostly remembers his conversations with his mom and helping her when she needed it, but that's all.

There's a sharp pain in the middle of his chest that simply won't go away, because he knows it deep in his heart that he should've picked up Will from Mike's house— and if he had none of this would have happened.

As he exits the school after an odd conversation with Nancy Wheeler, his mind is miles away. He's thinking about the fact that he's going to his father's home to check that Will hasn't escaped and is hiding there, even though he doesn't think that's likely. He's not even watching where he's going because all students are inside already, and that's the reason why he runs into someone without realizing it. His satchel falls to the ground and most of his things fall out, and he just sighs and shakes his head tiredly.

"Oh, I'm sorry." You apologize, immediately kneeling and starting to pick up his things. "I'm already late and I wasn't paying attention." His mind starts to run a thousand miles an hour because there's no way on Earth that of all the people he could run into, it's *you* who currently is helping him pick up his things. Well, you're not actually helping him, you're actually doing it by yourself, so he quickly kneels right in front of you and starts picking up his things himself.

Another sigh leaves his lips when you pick up all the fliers he had inside that have scattered all around you, and your expression clearly turns into pity.

Pity *for him*.

He doesn't deserve pity– this was all his fault.

"I wasn't paying attention either. I'm sorry too." He apologizes in a slightly hoarse voice, and he coughs to make it return to normal. You look up to him at that and he gets lost in your eyes almost immediately, because he knows it deep in his heart that there are no eyes more beautiful than yours.

He could get lost in them for hours.

"I'm sorry, Jonathan." You almost whisper, frowning sadly. "I just– I don't know what to say." He knows you're not talking about what happened moments ago anymore– now you're talking about Will's disappearance.

"You don't have to say anything, don't worry. Thank you." He says honestly, giving you as much of a smile as he can muster at the moment. You nod and hand him the fliers, but as he reaches for them, your hands make contact and he feels a jolt of electricity going from the tip of his fingers to the rest of his body, and by the look on your face he knows you felt it too.

"Jonathan..." His name leaves your lips in the tiniest whisper, and Jonathan nearly *melts* at how beautiful it sounds.

The moment you're sharing continues a few seconds longer as the speed of time seemingly slows and everything else in the world but you two disappears into nothing. However, it ends like all good things do, and it does with you blinking rapidly and pulling your hand away.

If it was for him, the moment would have continued for a lot longer than this.

"Um– I– I actually–" You bite your lip and grab the strap of your bag tightly, looking uncomfortable. "Can I have some of those fliers? I wanted to put some in my neighborhood just in case someone had seen him..." You trail off, looking down as if you are embarrassed. It takes Jonathan a moment to recover and process what you just said, because his mind is still fuzzy because of what just happened.

“Y–yeah, yeah. Sure.” He answers after a few seconds, feeling surprised and self-conscious at his own reaction. “Umm– here you go.” He hands you a small stack and you accept it with a smile before placing them in your bag carefully. “Ah– thank you for that, it’s really nice of you.”

“Oh, I just– I mean, it’s the least I can do.”

“Right. Thank you again. Anyway, I have to get going...”

“Oh.” You say, looking taken aback. “You’re not going to class today?” For some reason, Jonathan feels as if you’re honestly curious, like you’re not just asking him to make small talk.

He can’t understand why you would care.

“Yeah... I’m actually going to see my dad to check if Will isn’t at his house– I mean my mom already talked to him and he said he wasn’t but–” He stops himself because *why is he telling you this?* What possessed him to just blurt out his plans without a second thought?

“Oh...” You say, nodding slowly. “Yeah, that makes sense. I... I really hope he’s there.” God, the sincerity of your tone feels like it’s about to knock him off balance. It feels so good to hear you say things like these– things that make him feel like you care about him.

“Me too.” He responds, even though he knows very well that Will won’t be in Lonnie’s house. But he *has* to check anyway. “Um– I should go...”

“Oh, yeah. Of course. Good luck.” You smile softly, and then you do something he *never* expected you to do.

Ever.

You raise your hand, take a hold of his, and squeeze it before rubbing your thumb over his knuckles, and then let go again. Jonathan feels that he could start crying just because how incredibly good that little gesture felt.

He knows he can’t form words right now so he just smiles at you, nods once, and starts walking away towards his car. Before opening

the door he turns around and finds you still standing at the school entrance, looking at him. You gift him with a wave of your hand that he returns weakly, because at this point there isn't any more air left inside his lungs.

You two have known each other for several years already, and even though you've worked together more than once in group projects, he still hasn't mustered up the courage to have a conversation with you that isn't about school work. How is he going to? It's already hard for him to talk to most people— so how is he going to talk to you, the girl he's liked for so many years, if he can't talk to anyone else first?

He just can't. He wishes things would be different but, he doesn't think he'll ever be able to talk to you about his feelings.

As he drives away and sees the school getting farther and farther away from his rearview mirror, he realizes that there is no possible way in this world where he gets over his feelings for you.

He'll just have to live with them forever.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid." You mumble to yourself for the thousandth time as you get your things from your locker so you can finally go home.

You can't believe how you basically made a fool out of yourself in front of Jonathan, and you are one hundred percent sure that by now he must know how you feel for him. What kind of person just remains still as someone they were talking to walks away and *not only that*, but also waves them in the most awkward way a human being could ever wave to another? And what the hell did you think you were doing when you held his hand? You've known him for years and you know how uncomfortable he gets around people and when they invade his personal space and you went and did *exactly that*, and in a moment in his life when he's so *clearly* vulnerable— so you basically took *advantage* of him.

Oh, God. You should never talk to him again, and maybe that will solve things.

Or should you apologize? Maybe it would be good to just go and tell him “I’m so sorry for invading your personal space and waving at you like a fool” and then that would be done and you could crawl into a hole for the rest of your high school life.

No– you can’t do either of those things because right now he clearly doesn’t have time to deal with your apologies for being silly and you definitely cannot stop talking to him because it would be incredibly rude and disrespectful to leave him alone like that at a moment like this.

And also, why are you thinking about such trivial things when Jonathan is clearly living what it probably is the worst moment of his life? You should be worrying about him and him alone, not about how bad you looked in front of him. Every problem you have seems so irrelevant compared to what he’s going through, and it makes you feel incredibly guilty to feel so bad about yourself at a time like this. You wish you had a level of control of your own mind that would let you stop thinking about little things but you don’t– and even though the logical part of your brain realizes that it’s stupid to worry about the things you’re worrying about you simply can’t stop doing it.

As of right now, *everything freaking sucks.*

Even though Jonathan already decided not to tell his mother about the fact that he and Nancy just discovered that the *thing* she saw was real, he’s not entirely sure it’s the best course of action. He chose it because he doesn’t want to cause any more grief on her and doesn’t want her to worry to the point of a nervous breakdown– because knowing that Will truly is alive and he communicated with her somehow will put her on edge and she will be restless until she finds a way to bring him back home. He feels guilty for not telling her and for not believing her in the first place, but because he doesn’t know what she’d do with this kind of information he decided to keep it to himself.

He has a plan, and one he’s sure is going to work. He just needs Nancy’s help for it and once they both have everything figured out they will kill the monster and bring Will back safe, and then everything will be okay again.

But right now he has to get ready brother's funeral, where they will be burying God knows what instead of him.

He just has to wait a little longer, and then it will all be over.

You feel weird standing at the farthest side of the group of people surrounding Will's grave, because you desperately want to be near Jonathan and hold his hand, even though you know it probably won't mean a lot to him. God— he would probably feel annoyed at you if you did something like that because there's no comfort you can offer that will ever be enough in a situation like this one, no matter how much you wish there was.

So you simply remain in your spot in silence dressed in your black clothes, waiting for the people to disperse so you can say your condolences to him and Joyce.

Except that before you even have a chance to approach him, he's walking away with Nancy Wheeler.

You don't want to feel hurt by that— you really don't— but you are, anyway. Somehow seeing her makes you remember everything about yourself that makes you feel insecure— everything that you've been told clearly that you should despise about yourself.

Nancy is pretty and *petite* and smart and always looks good in all the clothes she wears, and now more than ever you wish life could be easier for you and you could simply be like her. Like everyone says you're supposed to look.

Smaller. Smaller. *Smaller.*

You swallow to get rid of the bitter taste in your mouth when you lose sight of them completely, and put on a strong front again so you can walk up to Joyce.

"I'm very sorry for your loss." You say, hugging her briefly. "My mom is working so she couldn't be here, but she told me to tell you that if you need something, just call her. And she also said to tell you that she really means it and that it's not just something she's saying given

the situation.” Joyce smiles softly at you and holds your hand, nodding.

“Thank you, sweetie. I will.” You nod and walk away so the other people behind you can get their chance to say their own condolences, and look around for a moment to see if you can find Jonathan, but you’re not lucky. With a sigh you start walking back to your car, hoping to see him soon at school so you can give your condolences then. It won’t be the same, but at least you will have said something.

As you drive away from the cemetery, you’re suddenly flooded by thoughts of what he could’ve been doing with Nancy when they sneaked away. You know for a fact that she’s not dating Steve anymore given the fact that he and his friends wrote a nasty message about her in the theater, and maybe they did it because she and Jonathan started seeing each other while she and Steve were still together. It doesn’t excuse the awful thing they did but it does offer you an explanation. Jonathan and Nancy seemed very close, and she’s so pretty and Jonathan is so incredible that it doesn’t surprise you there’s something between them. It hurts, given the fact that you’ve liked Jonathan for years, but it doesn’t *surprise* you. Also, their little brothers are best friends so it makes sense that they know each other better than you and he ever will.

You wish you could be brave enough to tell him how you feel, and you wish you were lucky enough for him to feel the same.

But this is the real world, and wishes don’t come true just because you want them to.

“Mom?” Jonathan asks softly, placing a hand on Joyce’s shoulder. “Where’s [Y/N]?” He *knows* he saw you before so it’s clear you came, but he can’t find you anymore.

“She left ten minutes ago. I think she was looking for you but she never found you. She was really sweet.”

Well, shit. He was hoping that wouldn’t happen because he needed to go get his father’s gun and figure out with Nancy what they were going to do, but inside he knew it was a high risk. He wanted to

Speak to you and thank you for coming, but he can't blame you for leaving after you spoke to his mother because he was nowhere to be found, and for all you know he could've left the place entirely.

Jonathan wants to curse at his bad luck, but instead he simply smiles at his mom and wraps one arm around her so they can go to their car and go home.

And, if everything goes well, solve this godforsaken problem once and for all.

You are one hundred percent worried about Jonathan, but it's not like you can make this particular sentiment known to anyone because even though you've known each other for years, the truth is that you aren't *friends*. Sure, you've liked him since God knows when— as a matter of fact, you like him so much that it's practically impossible for you to feel attracted to anyone else, no matter how much you try—but you have never found the courage to actually establish a friendly relationship with him.

You just know each other since always, and that's it.

Do you want it to be more? Absolutely. Do you think that will ever happen? Absolutely *not*. Especially not now that he seems to have grown incredibly close to Nancy Wheeler.

You shake your head as you continue eating your breakfast because once again your mind is invaded by those *dark thoughts*— thoughts that make you feel *less* and *unimportant* in comparison to other pretty girls like Nancy.

Smaller girls.

Thinner girls.

You finish your breakfast with a sigh because all of a sudden you feel tired and like you just want to go back to bed and spend the day there, but you know you can't do that. You have to go back to school and hope that today Jonathan is going to show up, and maybe you'll be able to—

“Will Byers is alive!” Your mother’s scream startles you so badly that you end up spitting the juice you were drinking, and you wipe your mouth with a paper towel before trying to clean out your now stained shirt.

“What did you say?” You ask her for confirmation, sure that you aren’t fully understanding what she just said. She doesn’t answer, she just throws the newspaper in front of you and the first thing you see is Will’s smiling face staring back at you.

THE BOY WHO CAME BACK TO LIFE

You feel your hands shake as you take a hold of it and bring it closer to your eyes, and you let out an involuntary gasp when you read the first sentence of the article.

The former missing child Will Byers has been found after a week of searching. He is presently in stable condition in Hawkins General Hospital. Byers’ mother, Joyce Byers, alleges Will was the subject of a secret government program run by the Hawkins National Laboratory. The allegation comes amidst a massive investigation into the hidden organization and its elaborate experimentations in perusal of mind control.

“Jesus Christ–” You breathe out, skimming through the rest so you can finish it as fast as possible. “I can’t believe this...”

“I know.” Your mom agrees, nodding. “I mean... maybe in some big town like New York or something I could believe it but, in Hawkins? I would’ve never imagined something like this could happen. Secret government programs... it’s just too much.”

“Yeah...” You reply absentmindedly, biting your lip as your mind is completely overrun by thoughts of Jonathan again, but this time they’re different. You’re not thinking about *your* feelings for him, you’re thinking about *his* feelings right now. Is he happy? Relieved? Confused? Scared? God, more than ever you wish you both were close friends so you could be by his side during such a complicated time.

Sadly, you’re not– and you have to remind yourself of that every time you want to be by his side.

Jonathan wakes up with a startled gasp, and it doesn't take him long to realize that he's covered in a thin layer of sweat. It isn't because he had a nightmare– thank God– but rather because he had a *nice* dream.

After everything his family just went through, he can't help but feels like he deserves this– this little piece of something good and nice, even if it's not actually *real*.

He falls back on the bed with a little smile adorning his face as his index finger moves to his lips, tracing them slowly as if what happened in his dream actually had happened just now in real life.

He wonders if he should write it down just in case he forgets, because it was so good that he never wants that to happen. He doesn't think he will forget, though; as a matter of fact, he's already remembering it all over and over again, especially his favorite part.

You were sitting cross legged on Jonathan's bed with his head on your lap, slowly running your fingers through his hair in a way that made him feel like he didn't have one single problem in his life anymore.

"Are you okay, baby?" You asked, smiling softly at him.

"I'm always okay when you're with me." He replied, rubbing your forearms with his hands. You smiled brightly at him and leaned down until you could press your lips against his, and he practically melted into you.

Three loud knocks on his bedroom door pull him out of his reverie and he quickly removes his hand from his lips, sobering up immediately.

"Jonathan, time for breakfast and then you *have* to go to school." His mother said.

"I'm awake, I'll be out in a moment." He responded, waiting until he heard Joyce's footsteps walking away. He took a deep breath and pulled the covers off of himself, thinking that no matter how good his dream was, he's now back in the real world and things couldn't be more different.

Besides, he has something else to worry about, and that's the fact that to the residents of Hawkins, Will has now become "The Boy That Came Back to Life". Everyone knows he's his brother, and if last night was anything to go by, there will be people hounding him and Joyce for more information today again.

He *has* to face this, even if he's not ready for it at all.

"Fucking vultures." You groan in disgust as you pull in the parking lot of the school, shaking your head at the dozen reporters craning their necks in the lookout for something.

Well, not something—someone. And that someone is Jonathan.

He missed the last two days of school last week, and there are journalists from all over the state waiting for him to get here. They haven't been lucky to get an interview out of Joyce or him and Chief Hopper placed police custody outside their home so they wouldn't be disturbed once Will got out of the hospital, but apparently the school doesn't seem to care about telling them to go away or they're getting something out of this.

They probably are, and it's probably money. Hawkins is a shit place anyway.

They're really disgusting people, having no interest other than wanting to get people to watch their shitty news or read their shitty articles. What about respect for human beings? Jonathan and his family just went through something terrible and the only thing they care about is squeezing as much exclusive information out of them as they can.

It's gross.

You take the keys out once you've stopped and throw them into your bag, or at least try to because when you hear the sound of them falling to the floor under the other seat you know you missed the shot.

"Damn it." You curse, removing your seatbelt and reaching towards it

to get them, but it takes you more than a few seconds to know where they are. The floor of your car isn't dirty but also isn't clean because people put their feet there, so you're a bit grossed out that you have to touch it. "Come on!" You complain, moving your hand a little further. The moment you feel your keychain, sound from outside makes you stay still in place, wanting to know what is going on.

"Mr. Byers!" You hear several different voices yell, and you sit back up immediately with your keys in your hands. Your expression turns into displeasure when you see the horde of reporters running towards Jonathan's car, ready to shove their microphones into his face to get something out of him. You can practically *feel* his anxiety all the way from your car, and it makes you feel incredibly sorry for him.

All this people disrespecting his boundaries, trying to force him to do something he clearly doesn't want to do.

At least he can still walk, and that's what he does with all the reporters screaming questions at him— while he ignores them completely.

Well done, Jonathan.

You get out of the car and lock it, resisting the urge to punch every single one of this people in the face.

"That was Will Byers' brother, looking clearly distressed. It's no surprise given the incredible circumstances his family went through in the past days—"

You scoff at the reporter talking to a camera as you walk inside, wanting to interrupt him to tell him that the reason he was distressed wasn't because of what he went through the past weeks, it was because they were invading his personal space and yelling invasive questions right into his face.

Assholes.

Maybe during lunch you can ask Jonathan how he feels— just to be polite, of course. There's absolutely no other reason why you would want to spend time with him other than being a decent human being.

No other reason at all.

Today was as good as Jonathan expected it would be— that is to say, it went pretty bad. First it was the reporters at the entrance screaming in his face to get information out of him and then it was the stares and whispers of his classmates about him and will, and then it was the speech every one of his teachers gave him about how “brave” he and his family were, making him feel not only uncomfortable but also incredibly embarrassed.

All of it was to be expected, that’s why he didn’t want to come to school in the first place.

He was able to push through everything, but now he just wants to go home to be with his mother and Will again. The only problem with that is that the reporters are still outside, interviewing random kids and asking them questions about him and his brother while waiting for him to get outside.

Jonathan knows he can get to his car and leave— it’s not going to be an *impossible* feat— but this morning and having to deal with the intrusiveness of those people left him feeling so on edge that he will postpone his impending doom for as much time as possible.

He’s leaning against the wall and staring out of the window in the hallway with a frown on his face, when a voice behind him startles him enough to make him jump in surprise.

“Jonathan?” You say, walking back a step when he turns around like a deer in headlights. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“No, it’s okay. I was distracted.” He assures you, giving you a small smile.

“Are they still out there?” You ask, moving to his side to look out for yourself. “God, they’re disgusting.” You mutter, shaking your head. “Do they have no respect for others at all?” Jonathan knows you didn’t ask expecting an answer, but he gives you one anyway.

“I don’t think they do.” He replies, gripping the strap of his satchel

tightly in frustration.

“God, I’m sorry.” You say, shaking your head and turning to him. “I saw them today when you got here.” You swallow and look at him for a couple of seconds without saying anything. “I... I actually wanted to talk to you during lunch, but I couldn’t find you anywhere.”

“You did?” He asks, unable to mask the surprise from both his voice and his expression.

“Well, yeah. I mean I saw how those reporters were harassing you earlier and I felt like I needed to... say sorry? For how invasive they were? I don’t know.” You give him a sheepish smile before covering your face and shaking your head, and just like that his day is improved by a hundred percent.

“It’s okay, it’s not like it’s your fault. But thank you, honestly.” He gives you a honest smile and you return it, before your expression turns and it looks like you’re thinking about something. “What?” He asks as you look out the window and the group of reporters staring at the entrance door, waiting for him.

“You’re here because you don’t want to face them, aren’t you?” You ask, turning to him again.

“Yeah.” Jonathan replies without missing a beat. “Earlier today... it didn’t feel nice.” That’s a way to put it, definitely. He damn well near had an anxiety attack from how they shot him one question after another.

“I can help you get away without them noticing.” You offer, biting your lip. “Only if you want to, of course.” His eyebrows shot up to his hairline and he looks at you questioningly.

“How?”

“Well, first you should know that it involves leaving your car here, at least for a while until they’re gone and you can come back pick it up.”

“I don’t mind that.”

“Okay so, because your car is still there they won’t realize that you’re gone until it’s too late...” You say, staring at them again.

“And how am I going to be gone?”

“With me in my car, of course.” You reply almost absent-mindedly, and Jonathan feels his entire body getting incredibly warm.

Him, alone in your car with you? For an unknown period of time? And you’re the one who proposed it?

Did the worst day just turn into the best day of his life?

“Uh—” He only manages to say, because his throat suddenly feels closed and he can’t get any words out.

“Or not.” You blurt out once you take a look at him. “It was just an idea, it wasn’t even that good—”

“No! Yes! I mean, it was. I want to do it.” He hurries to say, scared that you might pull back your offer. “It’s a great idea, thank you so much.”

“Oh.” You say, looking down and biting your lip. “Okay, just go out from the back and I will drive around the block to pick you up.” You smile at him and Jonathan feels that his knees are two seconds away from giving out on him.

“I will, thank you. Again.” His face heats up in embarrassment and he looks down, wondering why on Earth he has to act so weird when he’s around you.

“Okay then. I will see you in five minutes.” You smile and start walking backwards with a smile before turning around and leaving him standing there, alone, and smiling like a fool.

You can hear your own heartbeat pounding in your ears; wondering if this is what an adrenaline rush feels like. You feel like laughing out loud and you’re nearly shaking as you place the key in the ignition, and then you practically race out of the parking lot to meet Jonathan.

When you had approached him you hadn't even been thinking about offering him a ride— that was something that you came up with on the spot when you noticed his uneasiness, and it was completely impulsive. In the span of five seconds you went from not knowing if it was a good idea to being sure he was going to reject you to not giving a fuck if he rejected you because you *wanted* to offer your help so you were going to do it.

And it worked.

He said yes.

When you turn around the corner, your smile starts to get weaker as you are reminded by your traitorous brain that Jonathan is with *Nancy*, and even if he agreed to this you can't ignore that fact.

Of course he said yes to your proposal; he clearly was distressed earlier about the reporters and you offered him what seemed to be the only other viable option besides having to face them again, there is nothing more behind it.

With your mood clearly spoiled by your thoughts you stop the car in front of the back of the school, and just a couple of seconds later you see Jonathan opening the door and sprinting towards you. Despite what you've just realized, seeing him still brings a sincere smile to your face, because he's adorable and you like him *so much* and you're just about to spend some alone time with him, even if it's obvious nothing is going to happen.

He gets in and fastens his seatbelt while smiling bashfully at you.

So adorable.

"So?" You ask, driving away. "Do you want me to take you home or somewhere else maybe? I have nothing else to do, honestly." You actually have some homework to do but things like this never happen to you, and the homework isn't even due tomorrow.

"No, not home yet. If that's okay with you." He says, joining his hands over his lap. "Maybe we can go somewhere quiet?" He shakes his head and lets out a sigh. "Everything has been so loud today."

Your heart aches for him, so you nod and turn right.

“I have the perfect place.”

Jonathan knows about the abandoned Drive-In, but he’s never actually been here before. Mostly because it’s just sad to come here alone and given the fact that he doesn’t have a real group of friends it was sort of out of the question. He does know sometimes seniors come here to get wasted, but no one comes during the day.

It has an eerie feeling all over it, but it feels comforting somehow.

You park the car and stop the engine, and then you’re both invaded by an awkward silence that really feels a little out of place, given the fact that you’ve been making small talk with no problems for the time that it took you to get here.

“So, do you want to stay in the car or maybe go out... take a walk around the place...” He can sense your discomfort and worries about what he could’ve done or said to make you feel that way, and even though he can’t remember anything he’s sure he did something wrong.

“I’d like to walk, yeah.” He answers, swallowing and removing his seatbelt before exiting the car. You follow shortly after, joining him by his side with your hands shoved inside your pockets. You walk in silence for a few moments, and when he’s about to say something himself, you beat him to it.

“How are you, Jonathan?”

“I’m fine, you?” He replies instinctively, without even thinking about it twice.

“No... I mean, *how are you?*” This time he doesn’t miss the implications of your words, but you keep talking before he can answer. “I just– it’s just that I couldn’t even pay my respects to you in Will’s funeral and before I could find you to do so I found out that he wasn’t even dead and my head is *spinning* and if I’m confused I can’t even imagine how you could be feeling and I really just want you to

know that if you want to talk or vent or whatever I'm here to listen." You meet his eyes and he can see the nervousness in your expression, which only confirms his thoughts that you're being sincere.

You care.

For some reason, you *care* about him.

He lets out a breath and looks to the ground in front of you, where grass has been growing for several years already.

"Do you want to sit here?" He asks, not waiting for your response before sitting down himself.

"Sure." You say with a nod, sitting cross legged in front of him.

He focuses on the grass below him, removing some with his fingers so he can distract himself from the fact that you're sitting so close to his own body.

"I'm sure you've read about the whole thing with the lab and the experiments and everything." He offers, and he hears you breath out a soft *yeah* in response. "This past week, when we didn't know what had happened, and the body appeared... my mom, she didn't believe it. She was sure it was something else. She swore on her life that Will was still alive." He cuts a blade of grass in tiny pieces, and when he's done he moves onto another one. "But I didn't believe her. I accepted that he was dead. I pushed her and screamed at her, because I was sure that it was it. That my brother was dead and we had to move on." He lets out a dry laugh. "But he wasn't. And my mom knew and I can't help but feel like I should've known too. But instead I just accepted the lie and stopped fighting for Will."

"Jonathan..." You whisper, placing your hand on his wrist and squeezing softly, making him look up at you. "I know you feel guilty and I don't think anything I say will make you *not* feel guilty, but the truth is that what you did was completely normal. And rational. We all believed that it was true, and you shouldn't beat yourself up for thinking the same. These people clearly knew what they were doing." You release his wrist, as much as he wishes you hadn't done it. "And in the end you found him, didn't you? You kept fighting for him."

While the guilt remains inside of him, Jonathan does feel comforted by your words. This is the first time he has talked about it like this with anyone, and the fact that you're so open to comfort him makes him feel warm all over his body. And then, for the first time in his life, he makes an impulsive decision.

He reaches for your hand with his own and takes a hold of it, squeezing it softly.

"Thank you, [Y/N]." He gives you a small smile. "I really needed that." He knows he should let go of your hand but he doesn't want to, so he keeps holding on to it. And you're smiling so sweetly at him that he simply can't let go. "I haven't talked about this with anyone before now." You look surprised at that, and your face tilts to the side in confusion.

"Really?" You ask, frowning. "You haven't talked to Nancy about it? You really should, she should know how you feel about this." This time he's the one frowning, because what the hell has Nancy got to do with this? Sure, she knows about what happened but he most definitely doesn't feel comfortable enough with her to talk about personal things like this.

Not like with you, even though you're not really friends. But you reached out to him and he's liked you for years, so it doesn't surprise him that he opened up so easily when you showed interest.

"Nancy? Why would I talk to her of all people?" Jonathan asks, wracking his brain to find the reason why you suggested it.

"Well..." You seem a little taken aback. "Because you two, you know... I've seen you two..."

"What?"

"You know... you're together?" As a result of how surprised he is to hear you say that he removes his hand from yours, and when he sees you fold it back with your other hand where he can't reach them anymore he forgets for a moment about what you just said and regrets moving at all.

But then he once again remembers it, and he's surprised all over again.

"We are *not* together." He rushes to say, laughing a little at how ridiculous it is to even think about it. He's known Nancy for years already and she's always been Mike's older sister; even now after what they've been through together she still is Mike's older sister, even though he thinks a lot more highly of her than he did before.

But *like* her like that? Never.

Jonathan has only had eyes for one girl for as long as he can remember, and she's currently sitting right in front of him.

"Oh." You say, taken aback. "I thought..." You scratch your forehead. "I mean I saw you together a few times and after that thing that happened with Steve and Tommy and Carol I figured..."

"No, no, no, no. We're not together. Will and her brother have been friends since forever and I've known her for a long time but I don't see her like that. I never have." He knows that not only you don't know about his feelings but it's also impossible for you to reciprocate them, but he can't help but want to make sure you know that he doesn't like someone else.

"Oh, that's great." You say with a relieved smile.

Great.

What does that mean?

Great.

Your eyes widen just a moment after and you open your mouth like you want to say something, but nothing comes out.

"I mean that it's great that you're not together because that whole thing with Steve was kinda messy and I mean I really felt bad for her because she didn't deserve something like that." Right, of course that's what you meant.

"Uh, yeah. Yeah, I agree. He apologized to her and to me, though.

And it was sincere, which was kind of surprising.”

“He did? Wow, that’s definitely some improvement on his part. I don’t think he’s ever apologized to another human being before.” Jonathan laughs and shakes his head.

“I have to agree. But I think he might want to change for the better. He and Nancy have some stuff to work through after what happened.”

“Yeah, they sure do.” You groan and lean back on the grass, looking up at the sky. “Relationships are so complicated. I have to say I’m kind of glad I don’t have to worry about that.” Jonathan moves next to you and rests his hands on his chest.

“What do you mean?” He asks, frowning and turning his head to the side to look at you. You don’t look back at him.

“Come on, you know.” You say, shrugging your shoulders.

“Um, I don’t?” He presses, worried that this might be something obvious that he should know and that you’ll get mad at him.

“Jonathan, seriously. You know how things are for people like me, when there are people like Nancy out there.” What does that mean? What do you mean people like you and people like Nancy?

“I don’t follow...” He almost whispers, because by now it’s apparent that he should know what you’re talking about, but he doesn’t.

“Jonathan, stop. This is not cute.” You sit up before standing up, and then start walking towards your car, completely ignoring him.

“[Y/N], wait!” He yells, running after you until he can place himself in front of you to stop you from walking further. “I don’t know what you mean, I’m sorry. Please, I don’t understand.” He can hear his own desperation in his voice, but he can’t let you leave like that– without telling him what you meant by all of that.

“I’m *fat*, Jonathan!” You yell, staring at him in disbelief. “Guys don’t tend to pick the fat girl over the skinny one. I’ll never be as pretty as a skinny girl and I’m reminded of that every single day.” You let out a

dry laugh before rolling your eyes. “Would you pick me over someone like Nancy? Of course not. And I get it, I’m used to it—”

“I would.” He blurts out before he can decide against it. He cannot let you keep thinking this. Who wouldn’t choose *you* over literally every woman on Earth? How could they not choose you? You’re the prettiest, smartest and nicest girl he’s ever met, and it breaks his heart to hear that you don’t feel that way about yourself.

“What?” You deadpan, looking suspicious.

“I said I would. I’d choose you over anyone else.” He takes a deep breath because if he doesn’t say this right now, he’ll never have the courage to say it. “I’ve liked you since we were kids. Since the first day of school when you were wearing all red and I was alone because no one wanted to be around me and you came up to me and gave me half of your candy because you said I deserved to be happy on the first day, like you were.”

“Oh my god, I had completely forgotten about that.” You say, mouth open in surprise.

“You’re so beautiful, and it never even crossed my mind that you didn’t feel like you were because that’s just... someone thinking you’re not beautiful seems like the most ridiculous thing to me.”

“Jonathan...”

“It’s not like I expect anything from you but I just need you to know that you’re gorgeous, and whoever doesn’t see you as their first choice is an idiot.”

“Okay... okay.” You say, nodding a couple times. Jonathan tries to read you based on your behavior but the truth is that he has no clue what’s going on inside your minds.

Oh, God. You’re probably creeped out.

“I’m sorry...” He apologizes, having completely lost the fire of his previous confession. “Did I make you uncomfortable?”

“I– um– I... I’m just processing what just happened.” You say, taking

deep breaths. “I feel like you should know that I feel the same, though.”

The world suddenly seems to stop moving altogether, but Jonathan’s thoughts are moving a thousand miles a minute.

He didn’t hear you right.

He couldn’t have.

You did not just tell him you like him back.

Or did you?

You and Jonathan have been leaning against your car for at least five minutes now, at it would seem that you’re both waiting for the other to speak up first.

You asked him if he wanted to go “lean against your car or go inside or something” and he’d said “okay” and that was it. And now, neither of you knows what to say.

He just told you he’s liked you for years and you told him you felt the same, and if you were two stereotypical teenagers you would’ve probably kissed and sealed the deal, but instead you’re just standing next to each other in the most awkward way possible.

“I think—” You say.

“I should—” Jonathan says at the same time.

Figures. Neither of you talk for minutes and when you do you do it at the very same second.

“You first.” He says, giving you a soft smile that damn near makes you melt. “Please.” He adds, almost as an afterthought.

“I think we should talk about what happened.” You say, taking a deep breath. “I mean... You said you liked me, I said I liked you... I think we’re supposed to do something now.” Like make the hell out, preferably. Or something else, if he doesn’t want to do that.

“Yeah... I—” He runs his hand through his hair, making it look a little messier than usual. “I don’t know how to do this? I’ve never told anyone about my feelings before. I don’t know what’s supposed to happen.”

“Well... that makes two of us.” You say, chewing on your lip. Not that there was anyone but Jonathan for you to confess your feelings to in the past.

“Can I ask you something?” He blurs out suddenly, looking down.

“Yeah, sure. Whatever you want.” You reply, shrugging your shoulders. You don’t think the situation can get any more awkward than it already is, and maybe answering questions will ease the nervousness from the both of you.

“When did you know you liked me?”

Well, he went in for the kill.

“I don’t think I know?” You say, turning to look at him apologetically. “I mean, I don’t remember the specific moment like you do. But I just remember all of first grade knowing that I liked you. I just did. It was like something I’d always known. I never really questioned it.” You sneak a peek at him and the smile you can see on his face as he continues to look at the ground makes your heart feel a little lighter, and the awkwardness starts to dissipate.

“That’s really nice, actually.” He says, looking at you for a moment before looking away. He doesn’t speak for a moment while you wonder what’s going to happen next, and then you feel his fingers brushing yours and then his hand is around yours and his fingers are moving between yours and then he’s holding your hand. And it feels *amazing*. “Is this okay?” He asks, loosening his hold.

“Absolutely.” You say, grinning at him. He tightens his fingers around yours again and you bite your lip, trying to evaluate the situation to see if it’s okay to ask the question currently at the forefront of your mind. Fuck it. “So...how do you feel about kisses?”

“What?” He asks, surprised. You give him a smile and it only gets

bigger when his face turns red. “I– um, I’ve heard they’re good. I’ve never kissed anyone before.”

“I have.” You say, grimacing at the memory. “It wasn’t really good, though. It was kinda sloppy. I bet you’d be a much better kisser.”

“Um–”

“If you wanted to... like... kiss, of course.”

“I do.” He says immediately, swallowing visibly.

“Oh, okay.” You respond, trying to hide the fact that your insides have just exploded into a million fireworks. “Can we kiss now?”

“Yes.” He says, turning to you faster than you can register his movements.

“Good.” You take a hold of his cheek with your free hand and bring it forward to yours, and a second later his closed lips are pressed softly against yours, and you suddenly feel lightheaded and incredibly focused, and Jonathan’s hold on your hand tightens even more before loosening again.

He opens his mouth in a gasp and you deepen the kiss, making him whimper *beautifully*. You let go of his hand and move both of your arms around his neck, and his move awkwardly around your waist.

You don’t have a lot of practice and he has none, and even though this isn’t the most experienced kiss in the world it doesn’t matter, because the only thing important is that you’re sharing it with Jonathan, and that makes it perfect.

When you pull away, Jonathan’s arms aren’t wrapped around your waist tentatively anymore– they’re secured tightly around you, pulling you flush against him. Even when you separate it’s only enough to breathe, because he keeps his forehead pressed against yours as he tries to regain his breath.

With eyes still closed he rubs his nose against yours sweetly, and when you giggle at the gesture he opens his eyes and smiles bashfully at you.

“You’re adorable.” You compliment him, pressing a chaste kiss on his lips. “That was a great kiss.”

“It was everything I dreamed about.” You open your mouth in exaggerated surprise.

“You dream about me?” His face turns into a deep red color and you throw your head back and laugh.

“Sometimes.” He says, shrugging his shoulders. “I can’t control my dreams.”

“Fair enough.” You kiss him again before untangling yourself from him. “Let’s get something to eat.”

“Okay.” He agrees, and you smile before starting to walk around the car to get to the driver’s seat. But you only get a couple of steps before you feel Jonathan pulling grabbing your hand and stopping you. “[Y/N]...”

“What’s wrong?” You ask, walking back to him.

“What you said, about you not being as pretty as skinny girls... I want you to know that I want to help make you see how incredibly gorgeous and amazing you are. Every bit of you. If I have to remind you every day that you’re beautiful I will, if that’s what it takes for you to believe it. Because you are. God, you’re *so* beautiful.” The look on his eyes as he tells you this is so *earnest*, so *sincere*, that a part of you can’t help but believe him.

There are a lot of things that you could tell him after such lovely words, but since actions speak louder than them you simply bring your hand towards his cheek, brush his cheekbone with your thumb and with the most loving smile you’ve ever had on your face you close the distance between your lips and kiss him once again.

This time it’s softer, slower, and more intimate. It has more meaning than the previous kisses, and when you pull away and take a look at his face, you know he knows it as well.

“Come on, let’s go.”

You know that your insecurity issues won't disappear forever just because of the things Jonathan said because the world will keep telling you that you aren't, that your body isn't what it's supposed to be, that you should aspire to make yourself as small as possible– but right now, at this very moment, with Jonathan looking at you like you hung the moon in the sky, you can't help but take a step towards believing that what society says is *bullshit*.

You don't need to make yourself smaller for them, they will have to make room for you.